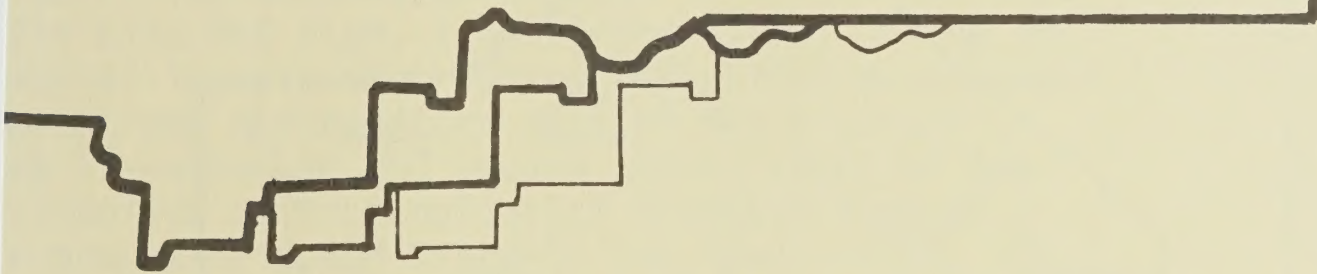


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THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF WEST PATRICIA



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VOICES FROM THE EARTH: A 7,000-YEAR OUTLINE



Ministry of Historical
Culture and Planning and
Recreation Research Branch

Hon. Reuben C. Baetz
Minister
Ward Cornell
Deputy Minister



FIGURE 1: *West Patricia covers 90,000 square miles in North-Western Ontario.*

ARCHAEOLOGY IN WEST PATRICIA

...the reason why

In 1978, the Ontario government initiated the West Patricia Land Use Plan, a multi-year study of the environmental impacts of proposed industrial development in the extreme northwestern part of the province (Figure 1)--about 90,000 square miles. Part of the study involves an archaeological investigation to locate prehistoric and historic fur trade sites, the first major archaeological inventory undertaken in the north. The results have brought to light some startling, new perceptions of the lifeways of our fore-runners.

An area erroneously thought to contain only sparse remains of a tiny-peripheral group of prehistoric hunters and fishers actually has been a vibrant community for at least 7,000 years (Figure 13). We have discovered hundreds of sites dotting every major river system in the area - the Attawapiskat, the Albany, the English, the



FIGURE 2: *Clay pot made by a Cree Woman 500 years ago on the Berens River*

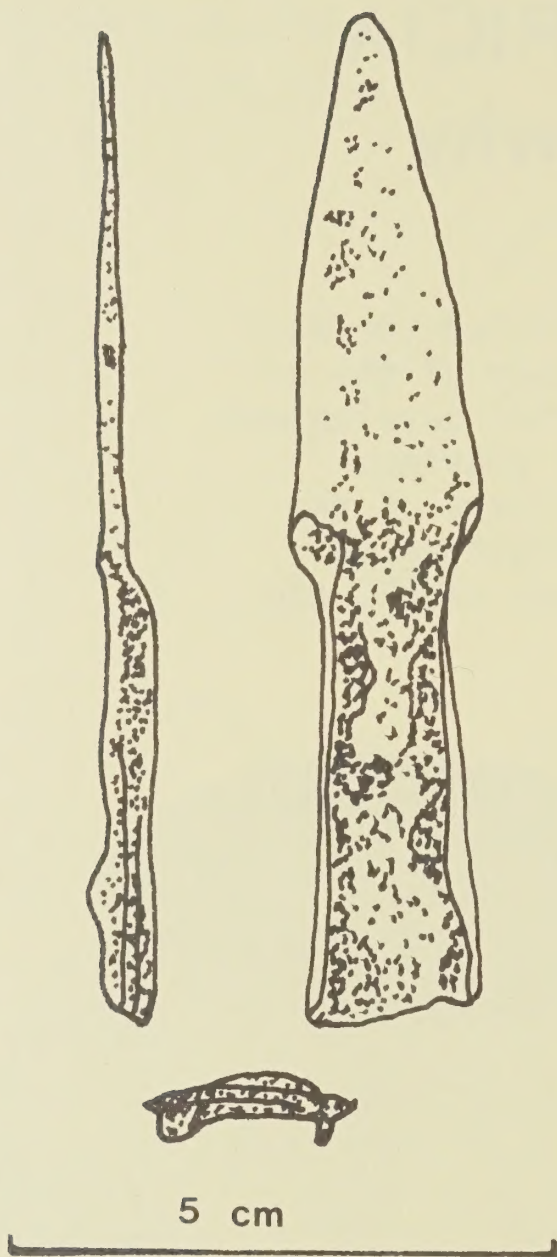


FIGURE 3: *Socketed copper point (side and front views and cross-section) from the Albany River.*

Berens, the Severn and others -- and these tell a story of people who knew and successfully travelled the northwestern routes for thousands of years. Early European fur traders did not "discover" a new land but were guided on their way by the native mapmakers of old, and they exploited Indian trade networks already in place along which went copper westwards from Lake Superior, furs, hides and meat southward to Minnesota, lithic materials eastward from the Plains and possibly cultivated foodstuffs northward from the Upper Mississippi.

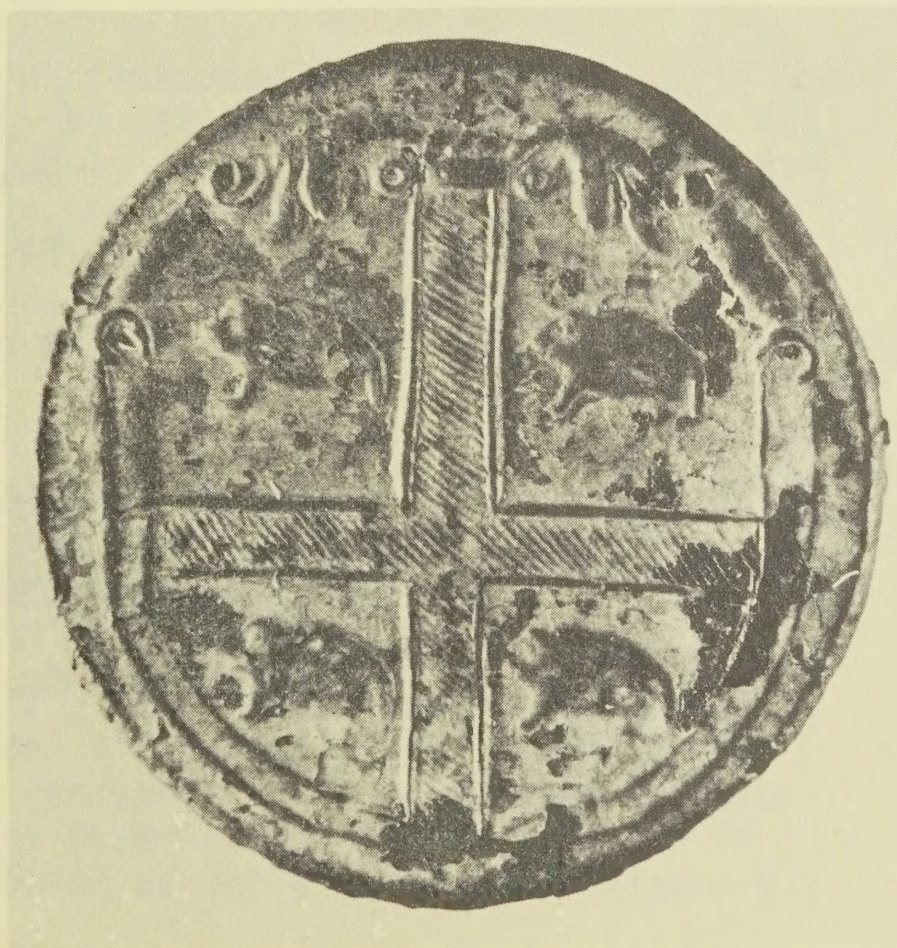
The prehistoric network of West Patricia is amply shown in the archaeological record - finely decorated clay pots similar to those found in Northern Manitoba and Northern Minnesota, beautifully flaked stone spearpoints and arrowheads made from "cherts" brought in from North Dakota and the Lakehead, and elegant tools of native copper imported from Lake Superior. Similarly the areas adjacent to West Patricia contain its products in abundance, especially the distinctive Hudson Bay Lowland "chert", a handsome tan stone material that was prized by prehistoric tool makers from Manitoba to the Lakehead.

The past is parent of the present, and by reconstructing the Past of West Patricia through its archaeological record, we can grasp how its culture came to be what it is today, and plan for its future.



FIGURE 4: *Nancy Schindelbauer, part of the Archaeological team, following the ancient trade routes on the Oiseau River.*

FIGURE 5: *Brass button from Attawapiskat Lake. It displays the centre portion of the Hudson's Bay Company Coat of Arms and was used on the uniforms of HBC staff and/or as a trade item.*



ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN WEST PATRICIA

...voices from the earth

1. The Palaeo-Indians about 7,000 to 4,000 years ago penetrated the North as far as Lac Seul in the west and 100 miles north of Lake Superior in the eastern part of West Patricia. Their existence in the area was previously unknown.

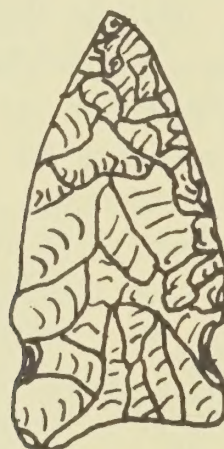


FIGURE 6: *Archaic stone spear points. The left one is a "Shield Archaic" type from Red Lake. The right one is a "Plains Archaic" type from Lac Seul. (Actual size)*



FIGURE 7: *Flaked stone knife, ground stone celt or hatchet, and ground stone "plummet" from Lac Seul, probably Archaic. The "plummet" may be a fish net sinker.*

2. West Patricia participated in the mainstream of pre-historic life, and was not a "peripheral" area as previously thought. This fact is demonstrated by the presence in the Archaic period of stone spear points typical of Minnesota, North Dakota and Manitoba (Figure 6) and copper tools like those from Wisconsin and the Lakehead. (Figures 3 and 8).
3. Artifacts of the Laurel (200 BC - AD 1000) and Blackduck (AD 1000 - AD 1700) cultures, previously found only as far north as the Red Lake area, have been discovered in the far north near the Hudson Bay Lowlands (Figures 9 and 10).
4. Pottery vessels of the "Clearwater Lake" type (ancestral Cree) discovered before in Northern Manitoba were recovered in large quantities also in Northwestern Ontario, indicating Cree people were here at least as early as AD 1400 (Figure 2).

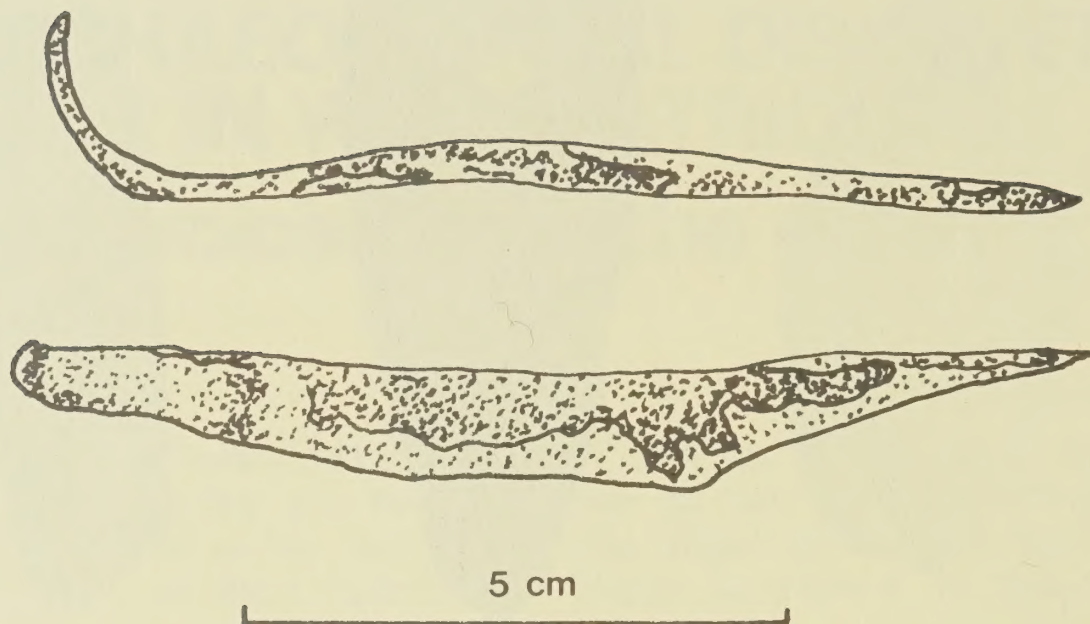


FIGURE 8: *Top and side views of an Archaic copper knife from Kenogamisis Lake near Geraldton.*

5. An emphasis on rock art recording in West Patricia (Figure 12) means we have a basis on which to begin intensive studies of styles, interpretations and cultural affiliations of Indian pictographs. Methods of dating the sites have yet to be devised but stylistic analyses may give clues. Our guess, on the basis of collected data, is a range from AD 1000 to AD 1800.
6. Researchers have remarked that archaeological sites in the North would be tiny - probably the remains of small, single-family hunting groups. However, sites such as Wenasaga Rapids at Ear Falls is large, covering several hundred square metres with well preserved remains - as many as seven Laurel pottery vessels may be completely reconstructable (Figure 9). It may have been a village housing many families of one band (about 150 people) and may alter our ideas of the social structure of prehistoric groups in the North.

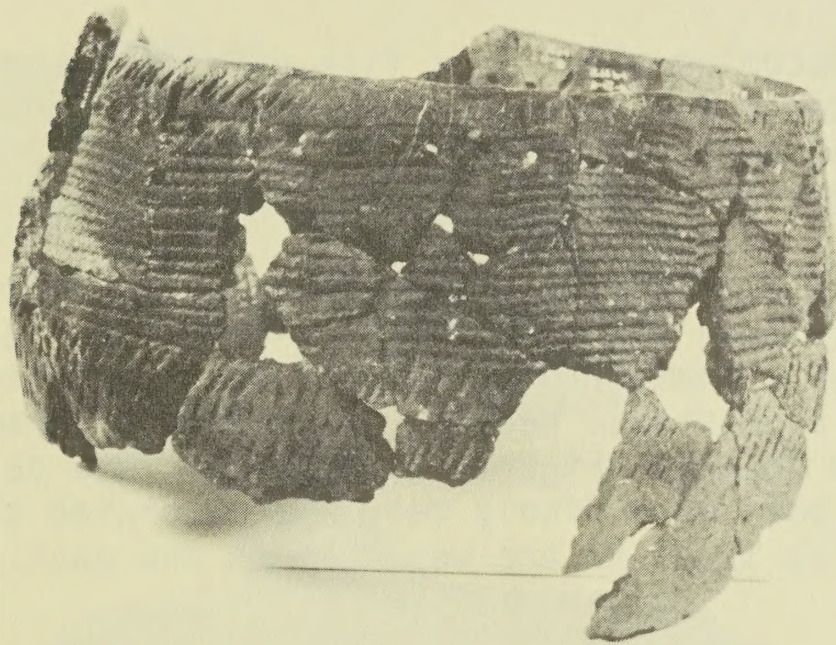


FIGURE 9: *Laurel pot from Wenasaga Rapids near Ear Falls, Ontario, partly reconstructed.*

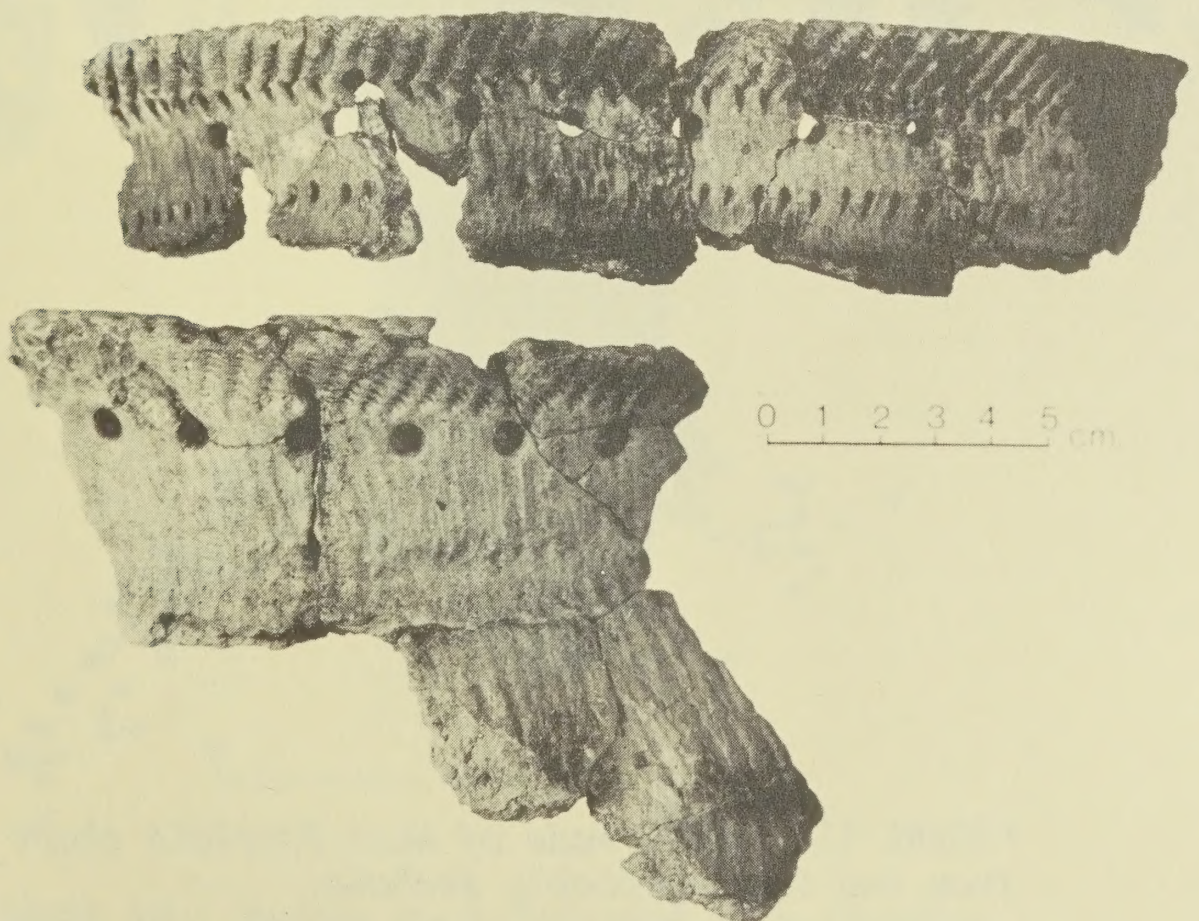


FIGURE 10: *Blackduck pottery fragments from Wenasaga Rapids.*

7. It is becoming clear that fish played a larger role in prehistoric subsistence than previously thought. The large villages such as Wenasaga are situated to take advantage of the spawning areas of West Patricia.
8. A completely reconstructed pottery vessel from the Berens River (Figure 2), one of the rarest finds in West Patricia, gives us a chance to appreciate the intricate craftsmanship of the prehistoric people. Prehistoric ceramics in North-western Ontario (Figures 2, 9 and 10) are delicate, thin-walled pots more finely made and decorated than Plains and Iroquoian types to the west, south and east.



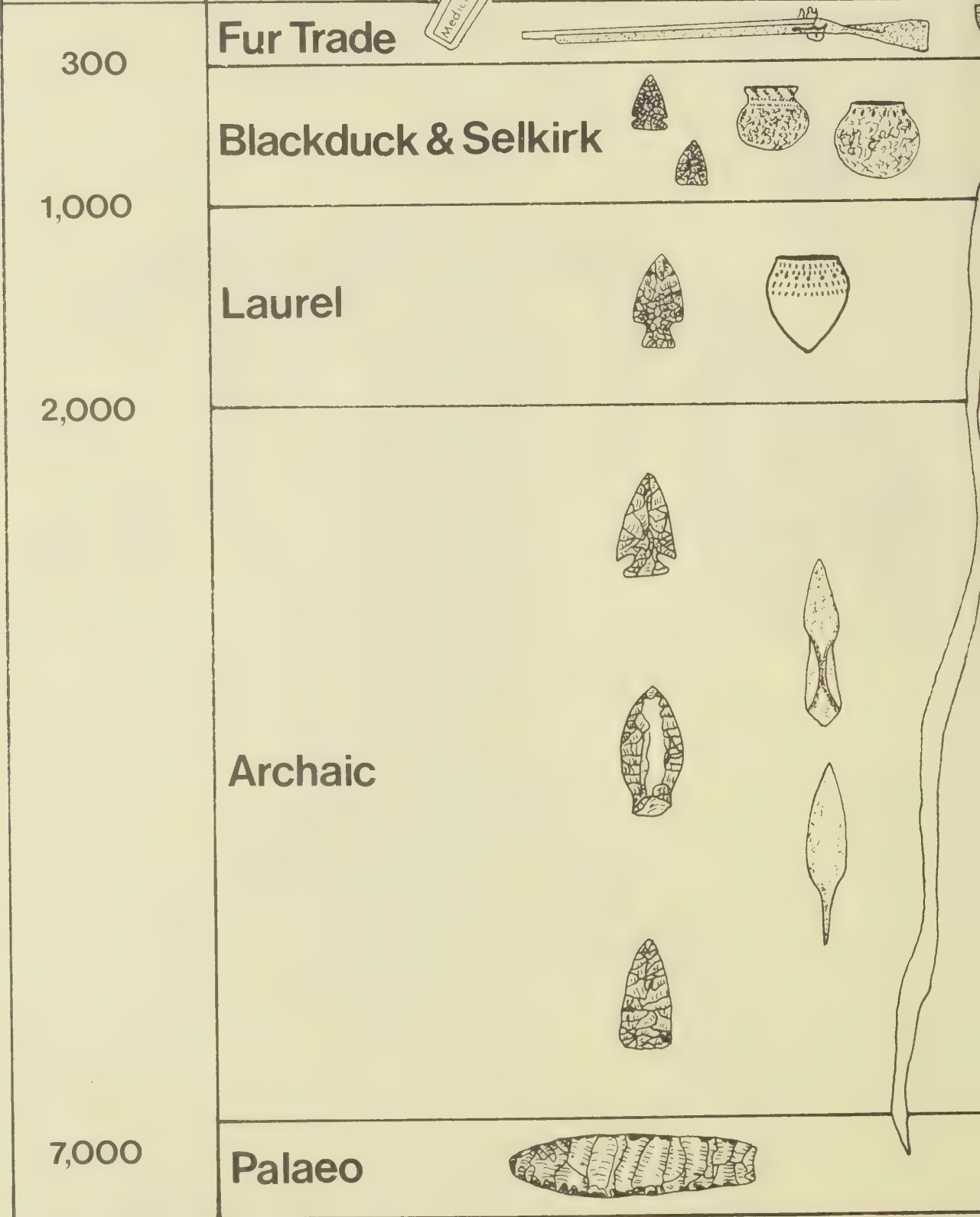
FIGURE 11: *Knife made of West Patricia chert from Red Lake, probably Archaic.*



FIGURE 12: *Indian Rock Painting of a Thunderbird and an unidentified tailed object, Deer Lake.*

THE ROOTS OF WE

YEARS AGO



FIGU

ST PATRICIA



- Introduction of French and English goods

- Origin of people disputed; possibly the descendants of the Laurel people

- Introduction of rock paintings and new pottery styles

- Probably descendants of Archaic people

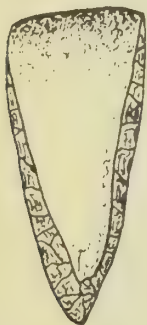
- Introduction of pottery and perhaps also the bow-and-arrow, bark canoe and bark lodge

- Immigrants with stone tools characteristic of the southern Canadian Shield and western Plains

- Use of stone spear points

- Use of ground stone adzes for woodworking, possibly the manufacture of dugout canoes

- First use of copper tools



- First people of West Patricia, from the south and west

- Hunted with large stone spear points

LANDFORMS AND GLACIATION

...in the beginning

The present landscape of West Patricia is a direct result of continental glaciation. At least 20,000 years ago a massive major ice front moved south and southwest from an area in Hudson Bay between the Labrador coast and northwestern Manitoba across Northwestern Ontario. This large ice mass deeply scoured the landscape as it moved as far south as the northern United States.

Most of the present day landscape is a result, not of the southerly movement of ice, but of the deposition left by its retreat that consisted of a series of halts and advances leaving landscape

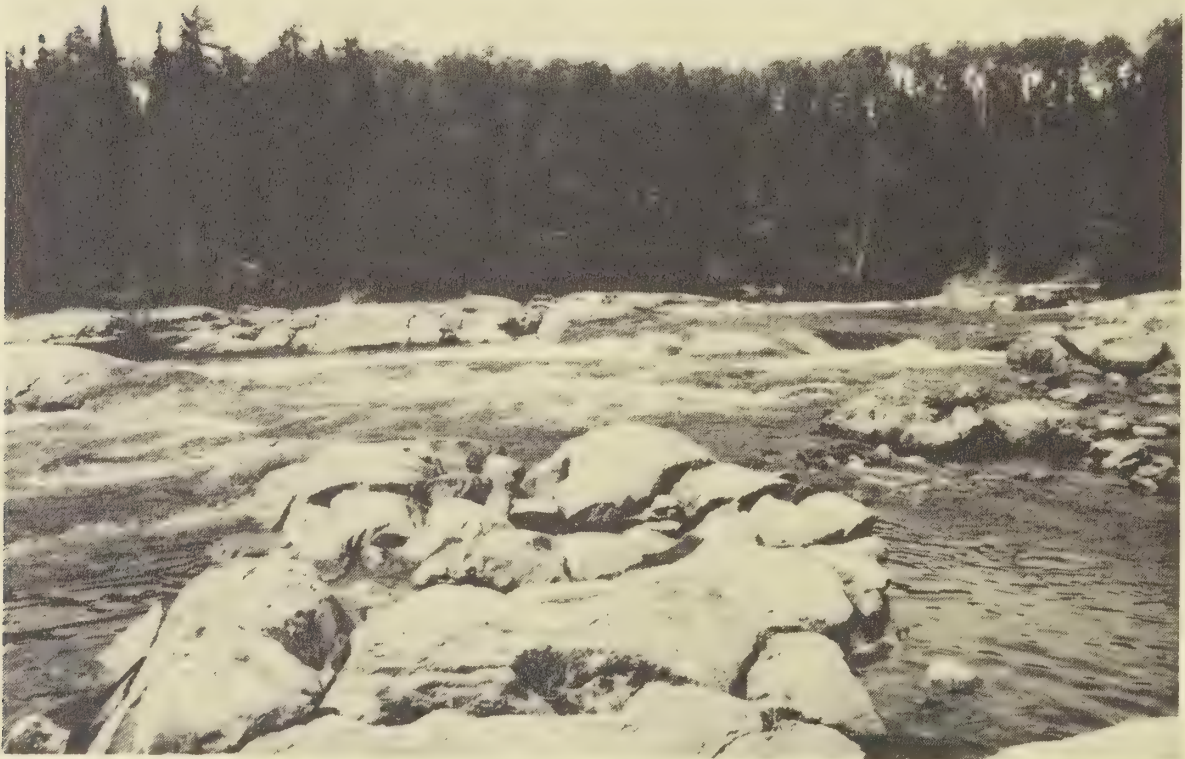


FIGURE 14: *Wenasaga Rapids near Ear Falls, Ontario, was a major prehistoric fishing spot.*



FIGURE 15: *The famous 1980 forest fires of West Patricia raged across the bay from the Wenasaga Rapids Site.*

features such as moraines (glacial drift deposited at the leading edge of a glacier), eskers (long narrow ridges of sand and gravel which were once the beds of streams flowing beneath, or in, the ice of a glacier and which were left behind when the ice melted), till deposits, and a realignment of stream patterns. There is good evidence that this continental glacier was still active in the northern part of the area as recently as 7,800 years ago.

As a direct result the ice retreat various large glacial lakes, formed by the meltwaters of the ice were present along the margins of the ice front. What has now become known as glacial Lake Agassiz covered a large portion of the southern and western part of the study area. It is only with the retreating of the glacier and the subsequent regeneration of plant and animal communities that the possibility of incursion into the area by man became possible.

The earliest evidence of man's occupation (Palaeo-Indian) of the West Patricia area is very sparse, occurring only in the southern fringes of the study area. This early occupation seems to be associated with the margins of glacial Lake Agassiz and can be directly tied to the time of the retreat of the glacial ice and the subsequent availability of the landscape for human occupation.



FIGURE 16: *Most of West Patricia is without roads. Archaeological crews flew in by bush plane from Red Lake, Sioux Lookout and Geraldton.*

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SURVEY ARCHAEOLOGIST

...journal entry July 23, 1980

Up at 7:15 a.m., greeted by a hot, calm and beautiful day. Heavy rain of last night had almost dried and we had no problem walking in the bush. Bugs were bad, especially inland, until 1:30 p.m. when a breeze rose from the northwest.

Before lunch we were able to check and test seven areas; two minor sites recorded. I was surprised by the lack of material from this part of the lake. There are many good camp spots behind both sand beaches and flat outcrops. Both of the sites occurred behind sand beaches and both faced northwest. Heavy recent use has occurred in both areas.



FIGURE 17: *Greeting the residents of Sharpstone Lake. Crews canoed the waterways of West Patricia.*

The wind rose steadily through the afternoon and by 4:30 we were forced to abandon the southeast shoreline and returned to our camp along the west shore. Checked nine spots along the west shore and recorded three sites, two minor unidentifiable prehistoric camps and a major living floor and associated features at the mouth of the river which flows into the lake. The site is on the south shore at the river behind a cobble beach. Three surface localities and a Laurel living floor, near the point where the lake and river join, were recorded.

Returned to camp at 6:30 p.m. in a rough sea with two-foot waves in a cross-wind. Were thoroughly soaked by the time we got back. The wind kept the bugs away until late evening when it died and the mosquitoes came out hungry for blood; retired to the tent shortly afterwards. Continued reading the "World According to Garp" until 10:15.

...discovering and recording the past

When describing how archaeologists do their work for the West Patricia project, it is best to describe first what we are looking for. Along the lakes and rivers of Northern Ontario are many ideal camping spots. Many used today have been home to people for thousands of years. Pieces of pottery, stone scrapers, projectile points and more commonly waste flakes of stone, discarded during the process of making stone tools, are found on the surface or in test holes placed across a camp site.

However, it must be remembered that the earlier inhabitants may not have always used the land in the way a modern camper does. Specific types of sites such as those associa-



FIGURE 18: *Indian rock painting on the Bloodvein River.*

ted with the gathering of wild rice, winter campsites, or specialized hunting camps may be found in areas which the modern camper would not use. Also, the changes in the climate and dam construction have caused changes in water levels so that some sites may now be either above or below the present shoreline. Changes in the course of a river or stream can also place sites in an area where modern man might not expect them.

Archaeologists must take into account all of these factors. The time budgeted for a survey and the immense size of the study area must also be considered. The vast majority of work so far undertaken in the West Patricia study has been done along the present water systems.

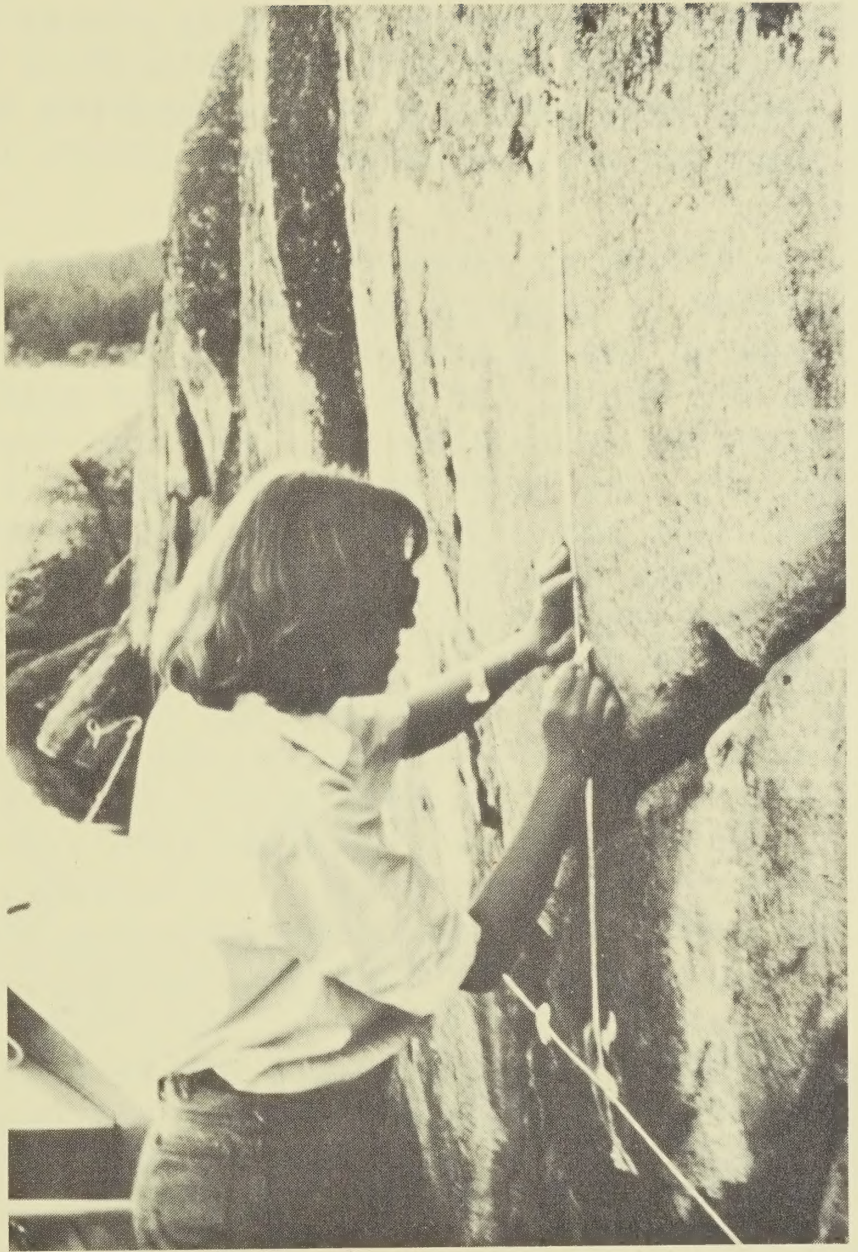


FIGURE 19: *Sheryl Moyer recording an Indian rock painting.*

A lake is systematically surveyed--all points, bays, rock outcrops and other possible site areas are first surface collected and then "tested" by means of a series of small excavation test pits placed across likely areas of past habitation. From this it is hoped that as many sites as possible will be found and their size and function will be determined.

Artifacts recovered in different portions of a site are placed in separate bags marked with the location so that, back in the laboratory, clues to the site's use, not visible in the field, can be found. For example, on many sites specific activities such as stone tool making, pottery making, the location of the dwellings and cooking activities may have taken place in different areas; by keeping the artifacts separate it may be possible to determine these activity areas by the numbers of specific types of artifacts found in each area - burnt and cracked bones, ash and cracked rocks would indicate a cooking hearth, while a hearth with broken pottery and fired clay may indicate an area used to fire clay pots. An area with high concentrations of stone waste flakes likely indicates a tool-maker's work shop. Other areas with scrapers and cutting tools may be evidence of food preparation or an area where hides were prepared for future use as clothes.

These interpretations can be full of errors and only further investigations can answer many of the preliminary interpretations. For example, a site that has seen a series of occupations through time (a "multi-component" site) may appear at first analysis to show relationship between activity areas while in fact these areas are a product of different peoples at different periods.

Many of the sites found in West Patricia contain only a few flakes and a single piece of pottery. In such cases, it is possible only to state that people have used the area and possibly, if an identifiable stone or ceramic artifact is found, what culture produced the artifact. On a daily basis, the surveyor locates a majority of this type of site. However, the rewards of locating a large and rich site, coupled with the beauty of the Northern lakes and

rivers far outweighs the daily scourge of bugs, and the occasional days spent wind-bound or forced into a tent because of rain storms.

Many of the areas studied have never been visited by archaeologists before. West Patricia is a vast area that still has mysteries to reveal.

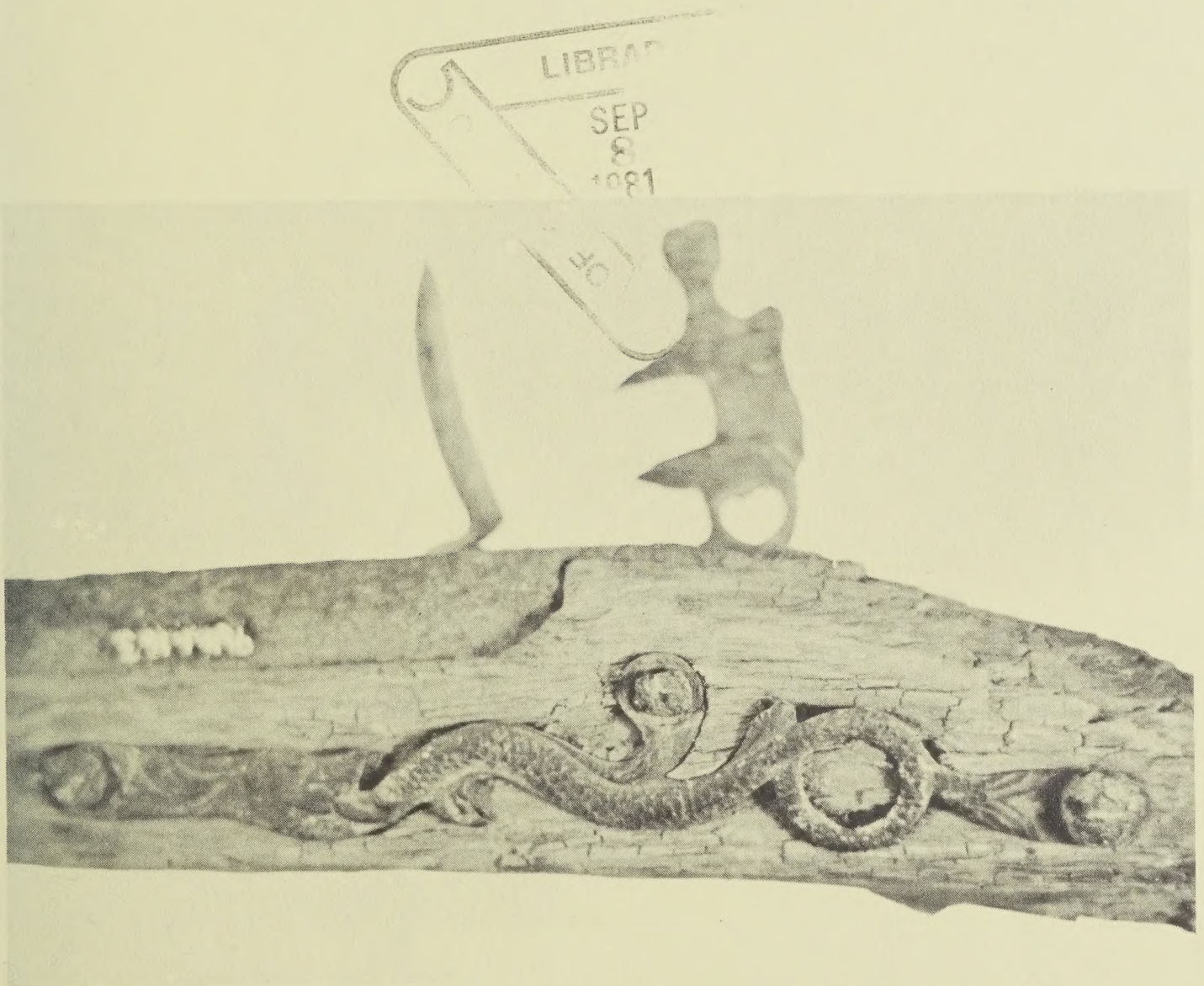


FIGURE 20: *"Dragon Side Plate" on a flintlock trade musket, 19th century, from Lac Seul.*

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